

SOVIET POLICY IX WARTIME

with our government. And this fact permits us to exert quite a bit of influence. Do you mean that you have as much influence with your authorities?"

"Yes, certainly we do."

"Well, in that case why don't you do us a favor? As you know poor innocent Iranians are still kept in jail for their alleged connivance with the Germans. The war with Germany is over, and, of course, it is a shame that good Moslems should languish in captivity for no reason whatever. Can you use your influence with the Soviet Ambassador to effect their speedy release? If you do, you will give us an irrefutable proof of the position you enjoy with your authorities."

Reportedly, the result of this conversation was an immediate visit of the Soviet Moslem chief to the Soviet Ambassador in Teheran to request the release of the internees. The Soviet government, sensing good propaganda potentiality for both the Iranian masses and the Iranian clergy, gave the order for release. Soon afterwards the internees were set free. It is open to doubt whether the Iranian public felt any gratitude toward Russia or whether the clergy was convinced of the influence of Islam in Russia. But one thing was certain, namely, that the British government was involuntarily placed in the role of villain, for it had not released the internees that were under British guard at the same time. The Soviet authorities obviously acted in bad faith, purposely avoiding consultation with the British in the matter. The British were eventually obliged to release their own contingent of prisoners,²² but the harm had already been done.

To an observer of the Iranian political scene it was clear that

Soviet propaganda was being stepped up and was becoming more and more anti-Western as time progressed. Even at the time of the greatest Soviet weakness when German armies pressed toward the oil fields of Mozdok and Grozny in 1942, the Soviet agencies in Iran relentlessly carried on their proselytizing activity. Until the fall of 1944 the anti-Western attitude of Soviet propaganda had, however, a veiled character. After that time it was openly directed against Britain and the United States. The turning point proved to be the conflict between Russia and Iran concerning oil concessions.

22 For the British explanation see the *Tehran Daily News*, Aug. 15, 1945.